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**DECISION MEMO**  
**POT MOUNTAIN TRAIL CONSTRUCTION**  
**USDA Forest Service, Northern Region**  
**North Fork Ranger District, Clearwater National Forest**  
*Clearwater County, Idaho*

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**I. Decision**

I have decided to authorize approximately 3 miles of new trail construction from Pot Mountain to the junction of Forest Road 5259, waterbar installation on approximately 9 miles of Forest Trail 144 from the junction of Forest Trail 617 to the junction of Forest Road 5259, and culvert removal and upgrade, streambank stabilization at rock creek ford, and drainage dip restoration on approximately 1.3 miles of Forest Road 5259 on National Forest system lands located at T39N R8E Sections 1, 2, 11, and 14 and T40N R8E Section 36 (Boise Meridian).

The majority of work will be accomplished primarily with the use of hand tools. Mechanized equipment such as a power wheelbarrow will likely be used to transport native materials such as rocks. The new trail construction will likely be accomplished through use of the State Mini-Excavator, which will be requested through the Idaho Department of Transportation. The culvert removal and upgrade, and stream ford stabilization would likely be accomplished by an excavator. The drainage dip restoration will likely be accomplished through use of the Trail Cat, which will be requested through the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Best Management Practices (BMPs) that protect or minimize effects to water quality would be implemented including worksite erosion control measures, and revegetation of disturbed soils after project completion. In-stream activities would conform to the Biological Assessment for Stream Crossing Structure Replacement and Removal Activities Affecting ESA-listed Species in Idaho National Forests (Programmatic BA) (June 9, 2005).

*Design Criteria*

The project includes design criteria identified below to prevent noxious weed spread and protect water quality and fisheries. These items are not all-inclusive, as the Forest Plan standards are incorporated by reference (USDA Forest Service 1987, as amended).

- ✓ Monitor for increased noxious weed presence and treat accordingly.
- ✓ Design all culverts to accommodate a minimum of a 100-year flow event.
- ✓ To protect water quality, specifically stream temperature, minimize the number of existing trees within the riparian habitat conservation area (RHCA) that are removed to facilitate replacing culverts.
- ✓ Comply with design criteria, mitigation measures, and recommendations in the Programmatic BA (See Appendix A), including the following:
  - Wash and thoroughly dry equipment for instream work prior to moving to the site to reduce the potential to introduce non-native aquatic species as well as noxious weeds.

- Minimize the use of machinery in the stream channel during project implementation to the greatest extent possible. Excavators placing riprap to protect bridge footings would operate from on the floodplain. Few, if any, stream crossings by machinery would occur except during the removal of the existing footings and placement of temporary piers.
- Minimize the extent of riparian clearing activities
- Employ erosion control measures, such as mulching and seeding, on exposed soils to minimize sediment delivery to the stream.
- Ensure a spill containment kit and plan is available on site and is used in the event of a fuel or oil spill.
- If any unrecorded heritage sites are discovered during the course of project implementation, cease all project activities in the vicinity of the site(s) and notify the District or Forest Archaeologist.

### Monitoring

Monitoring of this project will follow the direction in the Programmatic BA (USDA Forest Service 2005) and the corresponding Biological Opinion from USFWS (August 14, 2006) (USFWS 2006). Level 1 Teams will conduct annual field monitoring reviews of randomly selected projects in occupied habitat from previous years and will include personnel from the appropriate action agency.

The Pot Mountain Trail is an important single-track motorized opportunity for users of the North Fork Ranger District and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. This trail provides motorcyclists the ability to easily get into the high-country of the district and experience a true backcountry experience. The work identified with this project has been necessary for quite some time and without it taking place, trail conditions would continue to deteriorate, negatively impacting the experience for users.

## **II. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision**

### **A. Category of Exclusion and Rationale for Using the Category**

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined for 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(1) Construction and reconstruction of trails.

### **B. Finding No Extraordinary Circumstances**

In compliance with 36 CFR 220.6, the following resource conditions were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances existed to the resource conditions that could result in significant effects to the environment. Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision.

#### **1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species:**

The Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) Botanist, and Wildlife and Fisheries Biologists determined the proposed actions would have no direct or indirect effect or impact on listed or sensitive plant, wildlife, or fish species or habitat, and suitable habitat would not be altered because habitat is not present in the project area, habitat is present but the species do not

occur in the project area, or habitat is present and the species may occur, but the project would not affect the habitat for the species, and therefore no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding the effects to these resources, as documented in the Biological Assessments and Evaluations, and specialists' reports (see plant, wildlife, and fish sections of the project record), with the following exceptions.

**Plant Species and Habitat**

The Botanist determined the proposed actions may impact individuals or habitat of the following plant species, but are not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or reduce viability for the populations or species: deer fern, green bug-on-a-stick, clustered lady's slipper, light hookeria, naked-stem rhizomnium, and evergreen kittentail.

There are potential habitat or occurrences of these sensitive plant species in the project area, and it is possible that existing plants could be harmed during implementation. However, the potentially suitable habitat involved with the proposed management activities is a very small percentage of the suitable habitat within the project area, thus any negative effects would not threaten the viability of the overall habitat. Thus, there is no concern for the viability of any of these species as a result of this project and no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding the effects to rare plants.

**Fish Species and Habitat**

The Fisheries Biologist determined the proposed actions may impact individuals or habitat of Westslope cutthroat trout, but are not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or reduce viability for the populations or species; and may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect bull trout.

These determination are based on potential short-term effects when the culverts are replaced related to increases in suspended sediment. However, sediment deposition resulting from the project will be readily transported by the streams, and the amount of sediment is well within the streams' capacity to transport. Further potential for effects to federally listed threatened and endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species is documented in the Programmatic BA, the Biological Opinion from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS 2006) for bull trout, Biological Assessments and Evaluations, and specialist's reports. In concurrence with the Programmatic BA, the United States Department of Interior – Fish and Wildlife Service (2006) concluded that Columbia River bull trout in the coterminous United States are not likely to be jeopardized by culvert replacement activities.

The Programmatic BA contains substantial direction, design criteria, and mitigation measures which are incorporated as design criteria for the project to minimize risks of disturbance to the stream and fish habitat.

Long-term, the project would result in improved fish passage through the crossings and reduced risk that the crossing structures would fail during an extreme flow event, thereby resulting in an improved condition for the streams and fish habitat. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding the effects to fish species or habitat.

**2. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:**

The project area is not located within a municipal watershed, and no actions are proposed

that would modify or destroy wetlands, or modify or occupy floodplains to an extent greater than already exists. Where work is conducted at stream crossings, small amounts of sediment could be delivered to streams. However, the effects are expected to be low in intensity and of short duration. Therefore, no direct or indirect significant, adverse effects to floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are proposed or expected for this project. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding the effects to water quality of streams within the area; downstream waters; or resources in floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.

**3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas:**

The project area is not located within congressionally designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, or Wild and Scenic River corridors. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

**4. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas:**

The project area is located within the Clearwater National Forest Plan Bighorn-Weitas Roadless Area, and these same acres are also identified as the Bighorn-Weitas Idaho Roadless Area, with a Backcountry Restoration Theme in the Idaho Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart C).

The project is consistent with the Forest Plan, and specifically Management Area C8S, in that it maintains mainline trail system to standards of easy to moderate difficulty and provides opportunities primarily for nonmotorized dispersed recreation in a roaded natural setting. Consistent with the Idaho Roadless Rule, the Forest Service does not propose road construction or reconstruction or timber cutting, sale or removal. Additionally, no mineral activities are proposed for this project. Furthermore, I determined that the nine roadless characteristics will not be negatively affected by the proposal and the ability of the area to be considered for wilderness will not be altered. One or more of the roadless area characteristics will be improved as a result of implementation of the project.

Considering the consistency of this decision with the Forest Plan and its compatibility with the Idaho Roadless Rule, I find that no adverse effects to extraordinary circumstances exist associated with the South Side Fuels Project on the Clearwater National Forest Plan Bighorn-Weitas Roadless Area, nor the Bighorn-Weitas Idaho Roadless Area.

**5. Research Natural Areas:**

The project area does not include land designated as a Research Natural Area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

**6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites and**

**7. Archaeological sites, or historical properties or areas:**

The proposed actions will have no effect on religious, cultural, archaeological sites or historic properties because previous inventories have adequately covered the project area and no historic properties are present, or the project is located in an area identified as having a low probability for the presence of historic properties, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historical properties or areas.

Additionally, the Nez Perce Tribal Government Liaison and Nez Perce Tribal staff has had the opportunity to review the project for impacts to Nez Perce Tribe Treaty rights or Nez Perce Tribal members' abilities to exercise those rights. None were identified.

### III. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

On November 5, 2009, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests mailed a letter providing information and seeking public comment to 40 individuals, organizations, a variety of state and local agencies, and the Nez Perce Tribe. Seven individuals/agencies responded during the public comment period. We considered their comments, and although some respondents questioned effects to water quality, lack of multiple use in the area, and private land acquisition or use, we analyzed the effects of project activities on these and other resources, and determined no significant issues concerning extraordinary circumstances, use of the 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(1) category, or Forest Plan compliance were raised. The letters are located in the project record.

### IV. Findings Required by Other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that this project is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

**National Forest Management Act and Clearwater National Forest Plan:** These actions are consistent with the Clearwater National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1987), as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 because they follow the standards and guidelines contained in those plans. In addition, the decision considers the best available science [36 CFR 219.35(a) (Reinstatement of the 2000 Planning Rule; 74 FR 242)].

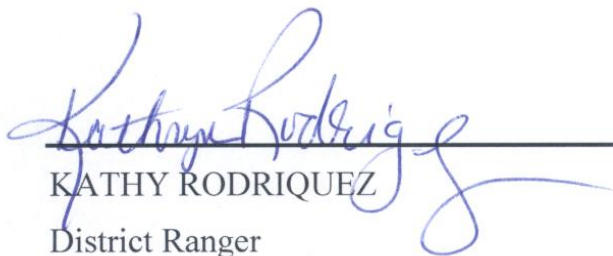
### V. Administrative Review and Appeal Opportunities, and Implementation Date

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations 36 CFR Part 215.12(f) and may be implemented immediately.

### VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Marty Gardner, Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor's Office, 104 Airport Road, Grangeville, Idaho 83530 or by phone at (208) 983-1950 or fax at (208) 983-4099 during normal office hours [weekdays, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (PST)].

### VII. Signature of Deciding Officer

  
KATHY RODRIQUEZ  
District Ranger

9-28-11  
Date

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